Elvis Sought to Aid FBI

Volunteered in '70 to Be an Informant

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By Rob Warden
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1970 photo

FBI memo said Presley "indulges in the wearing of all sorts of exotic dress."

Elvis Presley offered to become an FBI informant in 1970 and said that the "filthy unkempt appearances and suggestive music" of the Beatles were responsible for many of the problems the United States was having with young people, according to an FBI internal memo released yesterday.

The memo adds that Presley also "advised that the Smothers brothers, Jane Fonda and other persons in the entertainment industry of their ilk have a lot to answer for in the hereafter for the way they have poisoned young minds by disparaging the United States in public statements and unsavory activities."

M. A. Jones, chief of research in the FBI's crime records division, wrote the memo to his boss, Assistant FBI Director Thomas E. Bishop, after Presley visited FBI headquarters while he was in Washington to meet with President Nixon on Dec. 31, 1970. Presley received an award from the president for his work in discouraging the use of narcotics, and during a meeting with Nixon offered to assist the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.

A memo from Jones to Bishop a few days before the Presley visit says that the entertainer, after meeting with Nixon, also wanted to meet FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

However, Jones wrote that "Presley's sincerity and good intentions notwithstanding, he is certainly not the type of individual whom the director would wish to meet. It is noted at the present time he is wearing his hair down to his shoulders and indulges in the wearing of all sorts of exotic dress.

"A photograph of Presley clipped from today's (Dec. 30, 1970) Washington Post is attached and indicates Presley's personal appearance and manner of dress."

Hoover did not meet with Presley.

According to the later Jones memo, Presley, after his tour of FBI headquarters, "advised that he wished the director to be aware

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that he, Presley, from time to time is approached by individuals and groups in and outside of the entertainment business whose motives and goals he is convinced are not in the best interests of this country and who seek to have him to lend his name to their questionable activities.

"In this regard, he volunteered to make such information available to the bureau on a confidential basis whenever it came to his attention. He further indicated he wanted the director to know that should the bureau ever have need of his services in any way that he would be delighted to be of assistance."

The memo also says, "Regrets were expressed to Presley . . . in connection with (his) request to meet the director. Presley indicated that he has long been an admirer of Mr. Hoover, and has read material prepared by the director, including 'Masters of Deceit,' 'A Study of Communism,' as well as 'J. Edgar Hoover on Communism.'

"Presley noted that in his opinion no one has ever done as much for his country as has Mr. Hoover, and that he, Presley, considered the director the 'greatest living American.'

"Despite his rather bizarre personal appearance, Presley seemed a sincere, serious-minded individual who expressed concern over some of the problems confronting our country, particularly those involving young people . . .

"Presley stated that his long hair and unusual apparel were merely tools of his trade and afforded him access to and rapport with many people, particularly on college campuses who consider themselves 'anti-establishment.' Presley said that while he has a limited education, he has been able to command a certain amount of respect and attention from this segment of the population, and in an informal way, point out the error of their ways."

Should the FBI ever need Presley's service, Jones wrote, Presley could be contacted "under the pseudonym of Col. Jon Burrows, 3764 Highway 51 South. Memphis, Tenn., telephone EX 7-4427."

On Jan. 4, 1971, Hoover sent Presley a letter, which said: "I regret that it was not possible for me to see you . . . during your visit to FBI headquarters; however I do hope you enjoyed your tour of our facilities. Your generous comments concerning this bureau and me are appreciated, and you may be sure we will keep in mind your offer to be of assistance."

The file, which was released under the Freedom of Information Act, contains nothing to indicate whether the FBI contacted Presley after that. Hoover died in May 1972, and Presley in August 1977.